

With love and affection

W. A. Graham

HISTORY

OF THE

SOUTH FORK BAPTIST ASSOCIATION,

BY

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HISTORY OF SOUTH FORK ASSOCIATION.

CHAPTER I.

The Work of the Baptists from the Settlement of the Country Until the Formation of the Catawba River Association in 1827.

THE BROAD RIVER ASSOCIATION.

The "pioneer" work of the Charleston, S. C., and the Sandy Creek, N. C., Baptist Associations is divided in North Carolina by the Catawba river with few exceptions.

The Yadkin, South Yadkin and part of Catawba River Associations are the work of the Sandy Creek Association. The Green River, Broad River, King's Mountain, South Fork, part of Catawba River, French Broad, and nearly all the pioneer work beyond the Blue Ridge, of the Charleston Association and its successors.

The Charleston Association was formed in 1751 of four churches. The Congaree, including the upper portion of the state, was formed in 1771, "but on account of its interference with the internal discipline of the churches, infringing on their independence," it was disbanded after an existence of a few years.

The Bethel Association was formed in 1789, being composed mainly of the churches which had belonged to the Congaree and those formed in its territory since its dissolution.

Long Creek Church was a member of this Association.

Run The Broad River Association was formed in 1800 at Sandy River Church in Cleveland (then Rutherford) county, N. C. It was composed of Tyger River, Buffalo, Goucher's Creek, Buck Creek, Cedar Springs, State Line, and Boiling Springs Churches in Spartanburg county, South Carolina; Sandy Run, Green's Creek, Green River, Mountain Creek and Billy Creek in Rutherford county, N. C.; Long Creek, Lincoln county; Silver Creek, Burke county; Mountain Creek and Caney River, Buncombe county.

It is sometimes asserted that Buffalo, Long Creek and Sandy Run churches were organized by two visiting ministers, or missionaries, from the Sandy Creek Association. The time of this visit is stated by some to be 1772, by others, 1777. From what evidence I can gather, it seems probable that these churches were constituted in 1772 by ministers in the Broad River Association and that the "visitors" came in 1777, found them "inactive" and put them again to work.

If these visitors came in 1772 they found Friendship, Green's Creek, Boiling Springs and Goucher's Creek, with perhaps others, at work in this territory. If in 1777, the number had been considerably increased.

Whoever may have constituted these churches, their development and the occupation of the contiguous territory was the work of the Broad River Association.

The trade or commerce of the country was through Charleston. There was no occasion to go in the direction of the Sandy Creek Association, except upon the call of the government for services at the courts, or military duty. Is it not natural that the religious work followed the business routes? The missionaries probably reported the country "occupied," as the Sandy Creek Association did not send any others to prosecute the work.

I—LONG CREEK.

This is the oldest church in the territory of the South Fork Association. The time of its organization is uncertain, some claiming 1772, others 1777. It was a member of the Bethel Association, which was formed in 1789. It is on Long Creek, Gaston, formerly Lincoln, county, and about one mile from Dallas. There are no records of its earliest history. Its church records begin with a reorganization in 1794, as follows:—

Church
"We the Baptist Church of church on the Catawba River, Lincoln county, State of North Carolina, on Long Creek, being constituted, on the 8th day of March, 1794, by our beloved brethren Cleveland Coffee and Davidson Collins, ministers of the same faith, having entered into covenant with the law and one another, do think it expedient to keep a book of discipline, to which we have set the names of our elders and deacons and the number of our members in the

June

Lord, to which is annexed our covenant with the further events.

“ELDERS—Lemuel Sanders, Charley Jones.

“DEACONS—Samuel Swanengam, James Weathers, Julius Holland, Isaac West, James West.

“MEMBERS—James Weathers, Ralph Cobb, Charley Jones, John Weathers, Cornelius Rodger, Reuben Jenkins.”

The same year the membership was increased to sixty-three.

Deacon Julius Holland afterward became a minister and his death is noticed in the minutes of the Broad River Association of 1814.

James Lewis was also a member of this church and sometimes its pastor. His death is recorded in the minutes of 1834. His grandchildren, J. R. Lewis, of Dallas, and Mrs. J. D. Moore, of Gastonia, are active workers in the South Fork Association.

The Broad River Association met with the church in 1833.

Long Creek continued a member of the Broad River Association until 1852. It united with the King's Mountain in 1854, and the Catawba River in 1863.

II—HEBRON CHURCH.

Abernethy's ferry, (now known as Rozzell's,) was on the Catawba river, twelve miles west of Charlotte, at the point where the plank road to Lincolnton crosses the river. It was the head of navigation. “Flat boats,” laden with cotton and other produce, passed down the river from here to Charleston, which was the “entre port” for all this section. The boats were frequently sold after the cargo had been disposed of, as “poling” against the current frequently left but little for “freighting charges” above expenses. There was a canal from the Santee river to Charleston.

At the session of 1788, the Legislature of the State granted a charter to a company to “remove obstructions to navigation in the Catawba River.” One or more appropriations were made to aid the work. The race now used at Mountain Island Mills was cut to avoid the shoal, as was also the one at the “Powder Mill” at Tuckaseege Ford. Boating was continued until 1836. Afterwards the people of the country went by wagon to Camden and then by boat to Charleston

although they sometimes made the entire trip in wagons. On the Western, or Lincoln, side of the Catawba, at Abernethy's Ferry, was located Hebron Church, a sketch of which, prepared by its order, I insert:—

Hebron Baptist church was organized at Abernethy's Ferry, on the Catawba river, in Lincoln county, N. C., in the latter part of the 18th century. The log house in which these people worshipped first stood on the river bank, immediately at the ferry. No records of the church are known to exist earlier than 1834, but tradition and references in old deeds, carry us back to 1792.

An old negro woman now living, and nearly one hundred years old, whose name appears on the old church roll as "Sally, servant of Mr. Henderson," says her husband, Jake, who belonged to Richard Rozzell, told her that he was at the "raising" of the old church, and that James Abernethy "took up" one corner. This James Abernethy was drowned in 1785.

The tract of land on which the church stood was conveyed to Nathan Abernethy by James Abernethy and his mother, Elizabeth, on the 28th day of March, 1792. Nathan Abernethy sold to Nathan Saddler August 20th, 1803.

The following deed is recorded in Book No. 27, page 635, Lincoln county records: "This indenture made this 4th day of May 1816, between Nathaniel Saddler * * and Richard Rozzell * * witnesseth * * That in consideration of fifty dollars * * a parcel of land in State and county aforesaid; immediately at said Rozzell's Ferry, bound as follows * * * containing three fourths of an acre * * * with the following exceptions to wit; it is understood that the said Rozzell, his heirs and assigns are hereby debarred from building or erecting any house or placing any family to live or reside on said land or premises or to interrupt or molest the meeting house or people meeting * * * which land the said Saddler will warrant and defend against all persons whatsoever exclusive of above exceptions. * * "

According to the terms of a swap of land made in 1832, John Rozzell was to give the church a deed in fee simple for an acre of land nearly one half mile from the ferry, the consideration was to be the right of the church on the river

bank.

The old house was removed and stood on the new site until it was crushed by the weight of snow on its roof in 1852. The membership being too weak to rebuild, a "stand" was erected in the grove, at which preaching was continued at indefinite periods of time until 1883.

The organization having been dissolved in 1853 other denominations were allowed the use of the stand—the Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, etc.

The Methodists organized a society at that place, have erected a house of worship and now hold possession of the site. On the 7th day of February, 1883, before the Methodists began to build, brother J. C. Fichte addressed a letter to A. C. Rozzell, then in possession, in which he used the following language:—"I do want you to relinquish your claim, or whatever of claim you may think you have, to old Hebron church tract. We expect to reorganize the church and we are unwilling to surrender the site, for which we have a deed from John Rozzell, dated in 1832. This deed has never been recorded, etc." A. C. Rozzell disregarded this letter and in July 1883 conveyed the same land to the Methodist church.

The deed from John Rozzell to the church was in the possession of an attorney. It was obtained from him by an order of some one and could not be rediscovered. So the matter remains a mystery.

The following named preachers are known to have served the church:—John Ruker, 1800; McCrary and Hosea Holcombe during the same time; Wm. Richards, 1820-9; H. W. Carroll, 1839-46; then Wade Hill, as missionary of the Broad River Association; then Garrison and R. B. Jones, as missionary of the N. C. Baptist State Convention.

The Presbytery which dissolved the organization in 1853, was composed of Elders Alexander Abernathy and A. J. Cansler. The members went to Bruington and Salem churches.

Elder Geo. J. Wilkie preached here as missionary of the Catawba River Association once since the war.

In 1883 Elder John F. Morris, as missionary of the South Fork Association, preached here a few times. Through his

4 moved to Newberry Co. N. C. 1872

instrumentality the members of the Baptist churches residing between Dutchman's Creek and the Catawba River, in Gaston county, held a conference meeting at the Flat Rock School House, near Mountain Island, on the 8th day of June, 1883, for the purpose of consulting about the propriety of reorganizing old Hebron church. Bro Jno L. Grice was chosen moderator, and Bro. John C. Fichte, clerk.

The following preamble and resolution was adopted:—

“Whereas, the site of the old Hebron Church has been taken into possession by A. C. Rozzell and the deed for the same mysteriously obtained from the office of Geo. F. Bason, Esq., and, whereas, there can be no doubt as to the legality of our title, and being unwilling to surrender the same therefore, Resolved:—

“1st. That we reorganize old Hebron Church and that we meet for that purpose at the school house on the old site on the 6th day of July, 1883.”

Afterward the time of organization was postponed until the 5th day of October, 1883, when Elders J. F. Morris and T. W. Upton, Deacons John B. Stowe, J. M. Hollebaugh and J. R. Underwood, met at the old site at 11 o'clock, A. M. Brethren J. L. Grice, J. M. Bumgarner and J. C. Fichte, were also present. Mrs. W. F. Cannon had requested a letter from Salem church to join in the organization. * * * *

“Our intention was to occupy the school house at the old site, but the privilege was denied us by W. F. Cannon, who said he had locked us out because he was not willing we should reorganize the church at this place. After consultation we agreed to meet in the afternoon of the same day at the Flat Rock School House. Here the reorganization took place, Deacon John B. Stowe, chairman; John M. Hollebaugh, Secretary.

“The following persons presented letters and were enrolled as members:—

“Deacon J. R. Underwood and wife, Mary; Brethren J. L. Grice, J. M. Bumgarner and John C. Fichte. That evening the names of several newly baptized members enrolled. Bro. John L. Grice, was elected clerk.

“The above historical sketch was adopted as a part of the church record by the church in conference on the 13th of

September 1886.

JOHN L. GRICE, Clerk."

"This historical sketch has been published to inform the public of the trials and persecutions to which Hebron Baptist church has been subjected, and, also, to ask all generously disposed persons to assist this weak and struggling congregation to erect for themselves a house of worship upon their recently purchased site.

"Let all contributions be sent to the address of

Elder JOHN F. MORRIS,
Stanley Creek, N. C."

[N. B. I have abbreviated the sketch and made some slight alterations of verbiage in order to do so.—G.]

III—EARHARDT'S CHURCH.

The road leading from South Carolina to Beattie's Ford, (which was the crossing place on the Catawba for travel), near the Ford intersected the "State" road, which was laid out by act of the Provincial Legislature in 1763, and led from Wadesboro, by Salisbury, to Morgan—town.

Six miles from Beattie's Ford, and near a branch of the State road, was Earhardt's church, which was constituted in the last century. It was about fourteen miles from Hebron and Long Creek and near the road which would be travelled in going from either of them to Union (Warlick's) and Mount Ruhama, the next churches organized in this territory.

Abram Earhardt, upon whose land the house was located, and for whom it was called, came from Pittsylvania county, Va. He was here as early as 1763; was an ordained minister and preached at the church and elsewhere. He owned more than a thousand acres of the best quality of land in this section, also, a number of slaves, whom he desired to liberate in his will, but thought they would be worse off free in Africa than slaves in this country. He died in 1809. He built the first flouring mill in this region, also conducted a saw mill, cotton gin, tanyard, blacksmith shop and a distillery. His wife was a sister of Peter, Jacob and Abram Forney, the most influential men of that period. Some of the members of their families were members of the church. The

Forneys married Abernethys related, to those at Hebron.

Preaching was continued at the church, or in the orchard at the house, until the death of the widow in 1829. There was a burying ground at the church. Here he, his wife, and many of their neighbors were buried. Only unlettered stones mark the graves.

Those who could have given a history of the church have passed away and what, no doubt, was an interesting chapter in Baptist history will never be recorded.

The site is now owned by the writer. It is about one and a half miles from Kid's Chapel. A grand niece of Mr. Earhardt and her children are members of Kid's Chapel.

IV—UNION, OR WARLICK'S

Is in Burke county, five miles from Hickory. It was organized in 1815 by Hosea Holcombe, and united with the Broad River Association that year. Its first location was at the Mountain and it was known as the "Mountain Meeting House." Mr. Holcombe, who came from Virginia, was born in 1780. He was the most influential and, probably, best educated minister of his time. He continued as pastor until 1820, when he removed to Alabama, and was a pioneer Baptist of that State. Cathcart in the Baptist Encyclopedia places his labors in upper South Carolina. This was probably because he belonged to the Broad River Association. I think most of his time was spent in this State. The meeting house was afterwards removed from the Mountain (Baker's) to the present site.

Hosea Holcombe, baptized Alexander Abernethy (of the Hebron Stock) in 1827. He succeeded him as pastor of Union and served it for fifty years. *during its existence*

V—MT. RUHAMA

Is in Catawba county, seven miles southeast of Newton, on the road leading from Hebron, on Long Creek, via Earhardt's, to Union.

It was organized in 1816 by Drury Dobbins and Joroyal Barnett, missionaries of the Broad River Association, with thirtyeight members. It united with the Broad River Association that year, and continued a member until the foundation of the Catawba River Association in 1827.

The history of these churches will be continued in the Catawba River and South Fork Association periods.

The following ministers were active in this territory during its connection with the Broad River Association:—Hosea Holcombe, Drury Dobbins, Benjamin Hicks, Joroyal Barnett, Thomas K. Pursely, Ambrose Carlton; Fields Bradshaw, of Mt. Ruhama; Julius Holland and James Lewis, of Long Creek; Alexander Abernathy, of Union.

I acknowledge indebtedness to Logan's Sketches of the Broad River and Kings Mountain Association for great assistance in preparation of the above.

OCTOBER 1ST, 1899.

W. A. GRAHAM.

CORRECTION.

Page 20, paragraph 6, line 1, should read: "We, the Baptist Church of Christ, etc."

The committee on obituary was composed of Rev. C. M. Murchison.



